

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

MARY LOIS BRUECK EDWARDS

January 2, 1948
(1910 – 1998)



Mary Lois Brueck Edwards was born on March 16, 1910, in Ida Grove, Iowa, to Louis Albert Brueck and Mary (Saar) Brueck. As a young child, Edwards lived in Butte Creek and Westfield, Iowa, before settling in Highmore, South Dakota, in 1915. It is in Highmore that Edwards received her early education, graduating from Highmore High School in 1926. She then attended Watertown Commercial College in Watertown, South Dakota for a year before transferring to South Dakota State College in 1928. Edwards studied journalism part-time for five years at South Dakota State College until 1932, although she never received her undergraduate degree.

In 1932, Edwards and her family moved to Boise. She then lived in Caldwell and Weiser for a few months in 1933, before moving back to Boise. On July 8, 1934, Edwards married James W. Edwards in Boise, whom she later divorced without having had any children. Despite the divorce, Edwards elected to retain her married name.

Edwards worked as a legal secretary in Boise from 1935 to 1940 with J. L. Eberle and Judge J. H. Richards. From 1940 to 1943, she was self-employed as a public stenographer with the Hotel Boise. After these experiences, and having saved some money, Edwards decided to pursue a career in law and applied to law school. As she would later describe things, Edwards decided to go to law school “To get on the other side of the desk!”

During World War II, Edwards attended the University of Utah Law School and received her law degree in 1946. During this time she worked as a legal secretary for the Salt Lake City firm of Rich, Rich & Strong from 1945-46, and at the University of Utah School of Law in the law library in 1946. After graduating, Edwards worked in the President’s office at the University of Utah during 1946 while she was studying for the Utah bar.

After unsuccessfully sitting for the Utah bar, Edwards moved back to Boise and went to work as a law clerk for Eugene Anderson and Darwin Thomas in 1947 (the same office that Edith Miller Klein worked in at the time). Thereafter, she applied to take the Idaho Bar and her application was supported by character references given by James H. Hawley and Eugene H. Anderson. Edwards passed the Idaho Bar and was admitted on January 2, 1948.

An article in the January 12, 1948 edition of *The Idaho Daily Statesman* entitled “City Boasts Second Woman Lawyer” announced the news of Edwards’ passing of the Bar:

Boise now has two woman lawyers. One, of course, is City Magistrate Edith Miller, who was admitted to the bar a year ago. The other, a chic, businesslike young woman named Mrs. Mary

Brueck Edwards, took her oath Jan. 2 and thus became the nineteenth woman to be admitted to the Idaho bar.

The article continues by reporting that Edwards had been employed as a law clerk in the firm of Anderson & Thomas and,

Now that she has acquired her official status she receives clients and is looking forward to her first appearance in court. Because she is interested in everything and everybody, she does not plan to specialize in any one phase of the law, but prefers to have a diversified practice where she will run up against all kinds of problems.

In addition to her professional work, Edwards spent much of her time helping others, especially those less fortunate. Edwards served as an advocate for the disabled, checking on their living conditions and “if they were being treated fairly by the system.” By the mid-1950s she was doing a lot of “her own brand of public defending” through her pro bono representation of clients in need. She also worked with community organizations such as “Indoor Sports,” an organization that worked with disabled people (since she wasn’t disabled herself, Edwards was affectionately referred to as a “good sport”). It was during her involvement with Indoor Sports that she met a recently disabled young man, Robert T. Poole. Poole was a divorced father of a two-year-old girl named Susan Poole (Cardwell), whom he was raising alone. In 1955, Edwards married Poole and immediately became a mother by adopting Susan. According to Susan, Edwards “took to motherhood like a duck to water.”

Edwards did not work while she was married to Poole and the family moved often since Poole was involved in “heavy construction.” At the time of their marriage, Poole lived in Boise since he worked for Morrison-Knudsen. But, the family moved to Branson, Missouri, for the Table Rock Dam project, to the St. Lawrence Seaway, to Niagara Falls for the Niagara Falls Power Project, to Chesapeake, Virginia, and a power project at Pine Island, Florida, in the early 1960s. In each of these places, Edwards learned as much as she could about the area and went out of her way to help people, particularly the elderly and disadvantaged. For example, when Edwards lived on the St. Lawrence Seaway she looked after and fed several senior citizens, and when she lived in Niagara Falls she befriended an elderly Italian man, Mr. Talarico, who was 102 when she met him. Edwards visited Mr. Talarico each week to make sure he had enough food and was taken care of until he was placed in a nursing home at the age of 108. Even then, however, Edwards made the monthly trek to the nursing home to check on Mr. Talarico.

Edwards separated from Poole in 1964 and returned to Boise, where she continued her work for the elderly and disadvantaged. She also returned to legal work in Boise, working for the Idaho Legislature to review proposed legislation and later in private practice.

Former Idaho Attorney General David Leroy recalls working with Edwards in the early 1970s.

Even a quarter century after her admission to the Bar, Boise attorney Mary Edwards inadvertently signaled how difficult it had been to get proper respect and deference as a female in this profession. As a young Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for Ada County in the 1970s, I had a few minor criminal cases in which she represented the Defendants. I thought it quite odd that

when she phoned me, always she would say ‘This is Mary Edwards, Attorney.’ When I called her, she would answer, ‘Mary Edwards, Attorney.’ I now understand, with the perspective of history, that what I believed then to be a ‘personal oddity,’ was in fact a necessary defense mechanism to avoid being treated as and assumed to be the secretary in some male’s law office! She was a fine lawyer, well serving her clients.

Edwards was described as a kindhearted person, especially when it came to animals. If she found an animal in need of shelter, Edwards would often take it home with her. Given those interests, she was active in the Idaho Humane Society and championed animal rights. Her daughter, Susan, describes Edwards’ career as follows:

When you look at the life of Mary Brueck Edwards as an attorney, you might say there was not much spectacular. She didn’t litigate any memorable lawsuits that can be examined now as having set precedent. She didn’t propose any earth shattering legislation. But, she made a difference in so many lives, especially mine. She was exceptionally kind to all those people who had no one to look out for them. She was exceptionally kind to animals. So she lived a life that really mattered. She did make a difference.

Edwards died in Boise on April 24, 1998, at the age of 88.